DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 387 420 SO 025 357

TITLE	Religious Liberty, Public Education, and the Future of American Democracy. A Statement of Principles.
INSTITUTION	Vanderbilt Univ., Nashville, TN. Freedom Forum First Amendment Center.
PUB DATE	Mar 95
NOTE	7p.
AVAILABLE FROM	The Freedom Forum First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN 37212.
PUB TYPE	Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Citizenship; *Community Relations; *Conflict; Discussion; Elementary Secondary Education; *Public Schools; Religion
IDENTIFIERS	*First Amendment; *Religious Freedom; United States Constitution

ABSTRACT

According to this document, citizens need to reaffirm their commitment to the guiding principles of the religious liberty clauses of the First Amendment to the Constitution. The rights and the responsibilities of the religious liberty clauses provide the civic framework within which individuals are able to debate differences, to understand one another, and to forge public policies that serve the common good in public education. Yet, the statement says that many communities are divided over educational philosophy, school reform, and the role of religion and values in public schools. In the spirit of the First Amendment, the Freedom Forum proposes six civic ground rules for addressing conflicts in public education that deal with: (1) religious liberty for all; (2) the meaning of citizenship; (3) public schools belong to all citizens; (4) religious liberty and public schools; (5) the relationship between parents and schools; and, (6) the conduct of public disputes. Includes a list of 17 organizational sponsors. (LH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 387 420

SO

Religious Liberty, Public Education, and the Future of American Democracy

A STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

SO 025 337

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Charles Haynes

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U S DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Our
nation urgently needs
a reaffirmation of our shared
commitment, as American citizens,
to the guiding principles of the
Religious Liberty clauses of the
First Amendment to the Constitution.
The rights and responsibilities
of the Religious Liberty clauses
provide the civic framework
within which we are able
to debate our differences,
to understand one another,
and to forge public policies
that serve the common good
in public education.

Today, many American
communities are divided over
educational philosophy,
school reform, and the role
of religion and values
in our public schools.
Conflict and debate are
vital to democracy.
Yet, if controversies about
public education are to advance
the best interests of the nation,
then *how* we debate,
and not only *what* we debate,
is critical.

In the spirit of the First Amendment, we propose the following principles as civic ground rules for addressing conflicts in public education:

I. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY FOR ALL

Religious liberty is an inalienable right of every person.

As Americans, we all share the responsibility to guard that right for every citizen. The Constitution of the United States with its Bill of Rights provides a civic framework of rights and responsibilities that enables Americans to work together for the common good in public education.

II. THE MEANING OF CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship in a diverse society means living with our deepest differences and committing ourselves to work for public policies that are in the best interest of all individuals, families, communities and our nation.

The framers of our Constitution referred to this concept of moral responsibility as civic virtue.

III. PUBLIC SCHOOLS BELONG TO ALL CITIZENS

Public schools must model the democratic process and constitutional principles in the development of policies and curricula.

Policy decisions by officials or governing bodies should be made only after appropriate involvement of those affected by the decision and with due consideration for the rights of those holding dissenting views.

IV. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Public schools may not inculcate nor inhibit religion. They must be places where religion and religious conviction are treated with fairness and respect.

Public schools uphold the First Amendment when they protect the religious liberty rights of students of all faiths or none. Schools demonstrate fairness when they ensure that the curriculum includes study *about* religion, where appropriate, as an important part of a complete education.

V. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS AND SCHOOLS

Parents are recognized as having the primary responsibility for the upbringing of their children, including education.

Parents who send their children to public schools delegate to public school educators some of the responsibility for their children's education. In so doing, parents acknowledge the crucial role of educators without abdicating their parental duty. Parents may also choose not to send their children to public schools and have their children educated at home or in private schools. However, private citizens, including business leaders and others, also have the right to expect public education to give students tools for living in a productive democratic society. All citizens must have a shared commitment to offer students the best possible education. Parents have a special responsibility to participate in the activity of their children's schools. Children and schools benefit greatly when parents and educators work closely together to shape school policies and practices and to ensure that public education supports the societal values of their community without undermining family values and convictions.

VI. CONDUCT OF PUBLIC DISPUTES

Civil debate, the cornerstone of a true democracy, is vital to the success of any effort to improve and reform America's public schools.

Personal attacks, name-calling, ridicule, and similar tactics destroy the fabric of our society and undermine the educational mission of our schools. Even when our differences are deep, all parties engaged in public disputes should treat one another with civility and respect, and should strive to be accurate and fair. Through constructive dialogue we have much to learn from one another.

This
Statement of Principles
is not an attempt to
ignore or minimize differences
that are important and abiding,
but rather a reaffirmation
of what we share
as American citizens
across our differences.

Democratic citizenship
does not require a compromise
of our deepest convictions.
We invite all men and women
of good will to join us
in affirming these principles
and putting them into action.
The time has come
for us to work together
for academic excellence, fairness,
and shared civic values
in our nation's schools.

Sponsors

American Center for Law and Justice

American Federation of Teachers

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

Central Conference of American Rabbis

Christian Coalition

Christian Educators Association International

Christian Legal Society

Citizens for Excellence in Education

The Freedom Forum First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University

National Association of Evangelicals

National Association of Secondary School Principals

National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

National Education Association

National School Boards Association

People for the American Way

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

For more information, and additional copies, call
THE FREEDOM FORUM
FIRST AMENDMENT CENTER
AT VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY
1207 18th Avenue South, Nashville, TN 37212 (615) 321-9888